## COVID-19 Vaccine: “The benefits outweigh the risks”

Since it breached the shores of the United States in early 2020, COVID-19 has killed nearly 390,000 people across the nation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that number could swell to 477,000 by early February.

However, there is a ray of hope, shining in the form of two COVID-19 vaccines, which have been approved through emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Rollout of both vaccines has started, and some of the most common questions surrounding the shots involve side effects.

According the FDA, side effects may include injections site reactions, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain and fever. Dr. Victor Chan is an Emergency Department physician for OSF HealthCare. He says he and many of his coworkers who received the shot experienced just that.

“The second shot – I think going into it we anticipated some mild side effects, and the reports of the fatigue, some headaches and some people would have chills and body aches. That was consistent with what I experienced,” recalls Dr. Chan.

Some of the potential side effects of a vaccine can seem very similar to the symptoms of the illness it’s meant to prevent.

But if you understand how vaccines work, you’ll know that experiencing a side effect isn’t a sign that something has gone wrong. It’s a sign that your body has launched its immune response, just as it should after a vaccine.

“Some people actually in a weird way felt almost happy and reassured to feel those symptoms because we knew that the immune system in the body was working in the way that it was expected to,” said Dr. Chan.

Other more serious side effects to the COVID-19 vaccine are extremely rare. According to a study released January 6 by the CDC, the risk of a severe allergic reaction from the vaccine is extremely low. Between December 14 and December 23, 1.89 million people received the shot and more than 99.99% of them did not experience severe allergic reactions.

There is a lot of vaccine misinformation floating around, which could make those number seem scary to the average person. Dr. Chan encourages people to speak to their primary care physician and do their research, but make sure it’s with a trusted source.

“Social media is always a really easy access point, but places like Facebook are probably not a good source,” he cautions. “OSF has a very easily accessible portal with an area dedicated to vaccine information that has frequently asked questions. And then obviously the CDC is always a good place, too. So I think it’s important to make sure that we get our information from a reliable source.”

Despite the fact that these vaccines were fast-tracked, it doesn’t mean that they are not safe. In fact, The United States has the safest vaccine supply in its history. And agencies like the FDA and CDC have

established systems of clinical trials, monitoring, and extended monitoring to ensure vaccines are as safe as possible. This holds true for the current COVID-19 vaccines being distributed.

“Feel confident that there is a lot of science and there is a lot of research that has gone into this. There are a lot of other people that have already taken the vaccine, gone through those symptoms, and some of the potential temporary symptoms and side effects will go away,” Dr. Chan explains.

Dr. Chan says that the benefits to getting the COVID-19 vaccine far out-weigh any risks. He reminds us that we are looking out for others when we get vaccinated.

“It’s important to remember that the benefits are not only isolated to ourselves, but the benefit and the protection from the vaccine extends to our family members that we may potentially expose, and then, hopefully, eventually that benefit reaches out to our community as well.”

For additional information about COVID-19 and vaccines, visit osfhealthcare.org. Other helpful resources include the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Illinois Department of Public Health or the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.